

◀rent point of view” — a perception about what’s happening in the world today or what he calls the “redundancy of stupidity.” Much like his live show, Holcombe quickly follows up the phrase by yelling out, “There ya go! There’s a polished fuckin’ syllable for ya ...”

Talent like his should be on a major label to help get it out to the masses — and that was almost the case. A 1996 record deal with Geffen Records fell apart — his album *A Hundred Lies* was shelved, but released in 1999 by Hip-O Records — though Holcombe doesn’t look back in anger and prefers to look forward.


The same is true for his battles with substance abuse. He’s sober these days and focused on the future instead of being influenced by the past.

Where his studio work gets embellished with other instruments and session players, including former Johnny Cash bassist Dave Roe, Holcombe’s live show is what you would hope for — a man and his guitar alone in the spotlight. His finger picking style accents the emotion in his lyrics, his voice peppered in raspy hints.

Holcombe loses himself in the music and words he sings. His eyes close to a squint as the words and notes emanate from the stage. He rocks back on his chair enough to make you worry he’ll fall over. If the mood strikes, he’ll stand up and pace around the stage, bending over to sing into a microphone that never gets adjusted to a proper height, as if waiting for him to sit back down.

“It’s kind of nerve-wracking, but it’s show up or shut up,” Holcombe says of performing. “I don’t think about it a whole lot. I love studio work and making records. It’s an opportunity to share creativity and let the songs take on another life.”

He’s a storyteller in his songs as much as between them. Of course, you never quite know what is truth and what is stranger than fiction. I can recall a story he once told at the Muse about poking a hornet’s nest with a stick and wonder if it was true. “People like to tell tales and stories,” he says. “Sometimes they get a little better over time, whether they’re true or not. You start with the truth and then people put their own trip on it. I just try to tweak it a little bit.”

Looking back, it doesn’t matter if he stirred up the nest or not. It helped everyone in the audience connect to him and pay a bit more attention to the lyrics of his next song. It helped them forget their troubles, maybe for just a minute or even the entire show, and have a laugh and be entertained. After all, Holcombe is just trying to be of service. 

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#### MALCOLM HOLCOMBE

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[www.theeveningmuse.com](http://www.theeveningmuse.com)